

# Beyond Post-Truth: I-War and the Desire to be an Ethical All-American

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Academic literature, media coverage, and social media posts suggest that entire groups of individuals within the United States set truth aside and instead react incorrectly to fake news (see Bakir and McStay 2018; Polletta and Callahan 2019), or through conspiracy theories (see Hellinger 2019; Chebrolu 2021), or inauthentically because they are 'woke' (see Brian 2020; Kanai and Gill 2021) or have fallen prey to 'cultural Marxism' (see Jamin 2018; Mirrlees 2018). These conclusions are problematic and require a rethinking of the idea of the so-called post-truth age. At a minimum, the assertions themselves are post-truths predicated, as a matter of course, on a caricature of others and their worldview. More importantly, they fail to understand the elusiveness of truth and the complexity of knowing in a time when information flows have expanded, diversified, and quickened while other information flows are visibly constrained, noticeably blocked, and semi- hidden. But the focus on post-truth closes off deeper issues arising in American politics and society.

Why should we assume the other needs to 'wake up' to the truth? Put another way, why do those that accuse the other person of being seduced by fake news, cultural Marxism and so forth assume that they have sole-possession of the truth? Why does the person who assumes a monopoly on the truth take up the position of moral superiority and of being more patriotic? Why do these same people assume that they are representative of the 'real America' while those others are actively working to destroy the nation? Why does the exposure to fact-checking, scientific testing and verification, and the consequent debunking of these post-truths, as lies, result not in their abandonment, but in many cases the dismissal and the reaffirmation of those debunked truths?

To answer these questions, I introduce seven Lacanian concepts used to understand the formation of the subject: the mirror-stage, the split subject, the big Other, the real/imaginary/symbolic, fantasy, topology, and specific traits. The seven provide a solid means of engaging with Lacanian theory by understanding key concepts to help anchor and situate oneself within this literature. For the purposes of this chapter, the seven concepts form a core to help facilitate a better understanding of the subject-in-formation from a Lacanian perspective. What is required, I argue, is an understanding of the subject that desires to believe in belief more now than before. In doing so, a much deeper and historically rooted problematic surfaces within the American polity that has destructive implications within the United States and is of global concern. Drawing on the distinction between knowledge and truth, I argue that American culture is calling forth an ontological form of warfare. This type of warfare is expressed through a warrior identification described as 'I-War'. I-War signifies a specific distorted form of American subjectivity. It contorts an already existing impossibility; namely being an ethical citizen of the United States or more colloquially being an ethical All-American. To resolve this impossibility of being an ethical All-American, the I-War identification necessitates a topological worldview where the gap between knowledge and truths is held together through fantasy, specific traits, and enjoyed aggressivity which only then manifests as adherence to and propagation of post-truths.

The first part of this chapter discusses the theory of the subject from a Lacanian perspective. It establishes the subject as a split subject whose desire for completion renders it split between nothingness and something offered

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through the social authority referred to as the big Other. The second section applies this theoretical understanding to the contemporary United States by discussing the ethical All-American identification which is comprised of three dominant social authorities or big Others: the capitalist, the religious- moral, as well as the nationalist-patriotic. The third section discusses the shift away from the ethical All-American to an I-War identification that has come to dominate American subject formation within the contemporary American neoliberal symbolic order-disorder (Lushetich 2019). While this is most closely associated with the Presidency of Donald Trump who, in retrospect, was the first I-War president, it only represents a particular culmination and not an ebbing of I-War. I conclude by suggesting that the claim that post- truths are solely attributable to Trump supporters/conservative Americans is not accurate. Nor will it serve to be productive in addressing any of the intensifying crises within the United States. Rather the focus on post-truths and the discarding of entire groups of individuals as deplorables can only result in irreparable harm, nationally and globally.

## **Subject identification: I am (not) (t)here**

I begin with a brief exercise. Find a full-length mirror and stand before it. What do you see? Are you there in the mirror or are you standing before the mirror? You might say that you are both. If you are both, does this mean that what you see in the mirror is a subject like the person standing before the mirror? Maybe the image in the mirror is an object like other objects you look at, and see? How is it possible to describe the image of you in the mirror? Does your necessity to use language encapsulate what you see? Might there, for example, be a word that exists in your second language that better explains that something you see? This is the puzzle of subjectivity that Lacanians present, and it is the entry point into this chapter and to an expanded understanding of post-truths focusing on becoming a subject.

Lacan rejects any notion of the singular liberal autonomous subject. In its place is what Lacan refers to as the barred subject denoted by the symbol  $S$  with a line through it —  $\$$ . To understand the split subject Lacan introduces and re-works Freud's mirror stage. At its most elementary level the mirror stage reveals a spatial gap between the viewer and what they view in the mirror. What is reflected in the mirror is the ego forming a false self because you can never be a cohesive self when your only way to experience selfhood is through this unbridgeable division. In other words, in seeing yourself, you identify with what is not you resulting in two distinct mis-recognitions or mis- knowings of the self.

Internally, as Bruce Fink (1995, 45) notes, '[t]he splitting of the I into ego (false-self) and unconscious brings into being a surface, in a sense, with two sides: one that is exposed and one that is hidden'. The ego in this instance is the effect of images. It has an imaginary function whereby the image that we see is that of wholeness, mastery and cohesiveness. The ego promotes and maintains this illusion of wholeness, coherence, and mastery (Homer 2005). The mirror experiment is useful in helping to visualise and make sense of this split subject, but it remains a crude analogy. A more accurate portrayal is that of a Möbius strip as it shifts away from a binary structure. What is revealed is a single form where tracing from one side of the strip brings about the other side without breaking the line. This topographical perspective of the subject provides an understanding of the gap within individuals and how the conscious and unconscious remain united and manifest as subject. In this narcissistic moment fantasies of control and permanence of self become the bedrock by which the individual understands their place in the world. I develop this further later in the chapter.

The mirror stage then provides a clear visualisation that I, as subject, am external to me. While one's ego maintains the lie of singularity and cohesion it can only do so by viewing the self in the mirror as an object. It is me but not me, as the image in the mirror is separated from the viewing self. What one views is outside of oneself and cannot then be the subject. It can only be described as an object that I do not have agency over. Lacan (2006, 78) describes it is an 'armor of an alienating identity that will mark [sic] his entire mental development with its rigid structure'. This misknowing renders the subject as a rival to itself. What is seen is an ideal-ego or idealised-I. The idealised-I that is on display within the mirror is that which, I desire, everyone to recognise as me. Put differently, this is what I desire to be and how I desire to be gazed upon and recognised as a subject by the big Other (and the others). This becomes a more profound paradox, as this requires one to be the object of the big Other's desire without fully knowing what the big Other desires of me.

The gap between the I that sees, and the object reflected in the mirror, is characterised by an irreducible lack. It is a

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lack of subjectivity. It is a lack of completion as there is no final point. And it is a lack of control, as the power of recognition rests with the big Other. Complicating this further for the subject is not knowing what exactly the big Other desires of me and what I must be within the big Other's gaze in order to exist (Roberts 2005). The big Other does not refer to the postcolonial other. Instead, it forms the discourse and law that structures individual desire (Homer 2005). To restate the argument thus far, subjectivity arises from outside and from something other than the subject and we now can add it does not arise directly from the big Other nor is it transcendental.

To make sense of this Lacanian psychoanalysis introduces three overlapping registers: the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. The real is that which cannot be represented since representation implies an immediate transference to the other registers. Aspects of the real, of the external flow, are necessarily internalised and bracketed to be understood. In doing so aspects of the real are necessarily transposed into the symbolic and imaginary registers. In other words, the world is only available to us in purposeful reflection. What, for example, happened on 11 September 2001? This irruption of the real is only available to us through the overlapping imaginary and symbolic registers. For many it was the President's explanations on that day and subsequently with the address to a joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001 that transformed the real into the imaginary and symbolic registers. President Bush used words such as evil, acts of terror, and mass murder to identify the perpetrators and situate their criminal acts. The President explained why the shocking acts were carried out, indicating that they occurred because the United States was, 'the brightest beacon for freedom in the world' (PBS News Hour 2021a) and that '[t]hey hate our freedom: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other' (PBS News Hour 2021b).

The imaginary, then, is the realm of identification and idealisation and is made visible within the optical model of the mirror stage. The mirror exercise above denotes both the importance and the overlap of the symbolic order as it structures the imaginary. The symbolic, is associated with symbols such as language, images and codes. More importantly, the symbolic is the authority and the law of the big Other. It follows that the symbolic is of utmost importance as language is the only way the subject can be a subject, but that language pre-dates the subject and is bound up in the dominant understandings within societies. The subject is a divided subject caught between the imaginary/symbolic and their desire for subjective wholeness. The wholeness is that extra bit that escapes capture or what Lacanians refer to as object *a*.

As discussed above, the subject lacks any means of knowing the desire of the big Other, which itself is incomplete and changes. Subject formation, therefore, is dominated by lack in both the subject and the mirrors. The mirrors are characterised by lack, as they cannot suppress the irruptions of the real nor can they adequately represent the real (Stravarakakis 1999, 51– 54.) Anxiety then is associated with the desire of the big Other and it escalates when one has the feeling that they have the possibility of becoming the ultimate object of (the big Other's) desire.

In this chapter, I focus my analysis on the overlapping of the imaginary and the symbolic as the mirror phase, that moment when the individual recognises themselves as exterior to themselves (e.g., as reflected in image and the law of the big Other). In that instant of self-misrecognition, that is, of epistemological construction in the mirror the 'I' becomes a non-subject, an entity divided between a physical body and the idealised image (or idealised-I) contained within the mirror's image of the self and the discourse of the big Other (see also Kirsten Campbell 2004 and Kaja Silverman 1992).

## **The ethical all-American: Truth not knowledge**

Neoliberalism institutionalised with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, is constituted by three mirrors that hail and signify 'reality' for the non-subject. Reflecting the law of the big Other, these mirrors are the capitalist-market, nationalist-patriotic and religious-moral mirrors. This forms the idealised-I that I refer to as the ethical All-American (Uluorta 2016). The three mirrors provide an objective ordering and a degree of ontological certainty predicated on the perception that the mirrors pertain to natural laws forming a transcendental

truth outside of politics (and human intervention). The capitalist-market mirror conforms to the natural law of the market governed through the invisible hand that necessitates the truism of competitiveness. The religious-moral

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mirror is rooted in the law of God requiring adherents to the truism of the freedom of choice. While the nationalist-patriotic mirror is understood to be connected to the truth of American pre-eminence and exceptionalism. The desire, on the part of the hailed non-subject, to be an ethical All-American is a moral authority that can also be understood in its negative form. By refusing the lure of the big Others within the mirrors, one finds oneself cast as un-American. Failing to respond to the truth of the capitalist-market mirror marks one as a communist/socialist. To reject, or to make an unethical choice, imparts one as immoral within the religious-moral mirror. Failure to heed the truth of American exceptionalism, within the nationalist-patriotic mirror, marks one as a traitor.

The shift, presented here, from a singular mirror that is typical in Lacanian scholarship, to three mirrors is worth noting. Doing so provides an answer to the question about the ability of American neoliberalism to withstand significant shocks while retaining widespread legitimacy over the past 40-plus years. The rallying cry of the majority has not been to end neoliberalism, but to call for more neoliberalism (e.g., Tea Party Movement) or with a caveat of minor modifications (e.g., Atari democrats, Trump supporters). Adding to the above discussion on the Lacanian approach, the three mirrors intensify the desire to be an ethical All-American through qualities of repetition, distortion, and deflection.

Repetition is straightforward, as new technologies such as 24-hour news networks, social media, talk-radio, podcasts provide the means to reaffirm and maintain the big Other as consistent or in Lacanian terms without lack. Distortion highlights the desire we have for others to see us as ethical All-Americans. In this way, the big Other represented in the three mirrors becomes part of me. One can prove to others that they are the ethical All-American by being seen to be watching the right news, by following and sharing the right personalities on social media and informing our circle of friends and family that we listen to the right podcasts. In so doing, we participate in distorting our and other's reality for purposes that relate to our desire for subjective completion rather than simply noting the truth or expressing one's knowledge.

Deflection relates to how the mirrors do not provide a straightforward way to understand an issue and one's positioning. In other words, an economic issue does not have to operate through the capitalist-market mirror but could just as easily hail the non-subject through the religious-moral and/or nationalist-patriotic mirrors. The term globalising economy during the Clinton presidency provides a useful example. The shocks of (manufacturing) job losses were explained away through the capitalist-market mirror as the reality of living in a global economy. The nationalist-patriotic mirror though, repositioned this to be a struggle with Team USA competing against Team France and American exceptionalism preordaining American victory. The religious-moral mirror invoked the idea of the entrepreneur, as hero, requiring freedom to compete using the invisible hand as their only guide. This becomes especially clear, for example, as the Tea Party Movement would espouse this religious-moral truism to challenge the legitimacy of the Bush administration's passage of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 (Meckler and Martin 2012).

Repetition, distortion, and deflection partially obscure the fact that the big Others are incomplete. The non-subject avoids the trauma of this lack through fantasy. As Jodi Dean (2005, 13) posits,

fantasy binds me to a certain set of relations. It structures and confines my thinking and acting such that my desires attach me to seemingly inescapable hierarchical relations or patterns of domination. The possibility of enjoyment that the fantasy holds open makes it very difficult for me to resist or break out of the situation in which I find myself.

The mirror stage reveals that one cannot be oneself. Instead, one is condemned to be a split-subject that requires the maintenance of a fantasy of subjective completion through adherence to the three mirrors that are also incomplete. In this way, fantasy does double duty as the inability of the symbolic to symbolise the real is masked through fantasy.

Lacan identifies two basic fantasies of the non-subject. The first is that someone or something wants to steal the enjoyment I will receive by being an ethical All-American. The often-repeated truism, the terrorists want to destroy our way of life is an example of this first type of fantasy. In this fantasy glossed over are the rising levels of social exclusion, income and wealth inequality within the United States as well as the consequences of poorly considered, designed and executed American foreign policy. A second fantasy assumes that the other is enjoying some form of

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excessive enjoyment which threatens the very possibility of me becoming an ethical All-American. President Reagan's reference to the supposed truth of 'welfare queens' sitting idly at home, engaging endlessly in extra-marital sex to collect higher child welfare benefits negated the real issues of deindustrialisation, racial segregation, and concentration of poor people geographically in hollowed out cities (Kandaswamy 2012). It is with this understanding of fantasy as a constitutive element of identity construction that political issues such as outsourcing, the rise of China and other competitors and so forth have been framed.

As Žižek (1989, 21) writes, the ideological is precisely, 'a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence'. What Žižek is noting is a distinction between knowledge and truth. Knowledge and truth are not indivisible. As it is often the case, we possess one and not the other. Truth and knowledge may more aptly be understood to be topologically related to one another, as there is a rubber logic that holds them together-apart. Often called qualitative mathematics, topology focuses on how different shapes can be stretched, twisted, bent, distorted and so forth in space without altering their intrinsic nature. Think, for example, of accusing someone of stretching the truth. What is being suggested with this phrase is that the truth remains foregrounded while the knowledge that supports the truth has receded. This allows the person to expand the truth of their statement as non-knowledge remains as an essence of the (stretched) truth.

Building on this notion of the rubber band, if one takes the band and pinches, twists, and pulls it what remains is still a rubber band. Another name for this twisted rubber band is a Möbius strip. This, for Lacanians, is the preferred way to understand the mirror phase. The visualisation metaphor of mirrors is useful as it allows one to see how the non-subject becomes themselves thanks to their linkage with the big Others of the capitalist-market, religious- moral and nationalist-patriotic. It has a critical limitation with deep implications. Understanding identification and subject formation through the concept of mirrors is also productive of the binary I/not I. Afterall, one might conclude that I look out to the mirrors and am reflected in them. It suggests then that I am an undivided self and could remedy any malady by rejecting the external impositions seen in the mirrors. The mirrors, however, are not opposite from us. Nor are they separated from us. We are divided from the start. This cannot be undone as this divide is part of the human condition. A topological understanding provides a more accurate understanding of this condition that the mirror metaphor simply cannot. In short, there is no 'I' that sees a reflection of the ethical-All American as out there. Instead, the non-subject is linked through the topological figure of the Möbius strip, where the outside connects with a singular line to its interior.

This is an important enhancement of the discussion thus far, as truth may be considered to be within the non-subject while knowledge is derived through tracing the line to the outside imaginary/symbolic or big Others. Recall that incursions of the real require discursive interpretation that arises within the imaginary/symbolic registers. The desire to be the ethical All-American demonstrates that the relationship between knowledge, truth and post-truth is not simple nor straightforward. Truth may precede knowledge, as we accumulate knowledge to arrive at the truths, we supposed existed. In other words, it is through the acquisition of knowledge that we arrive at truths. One can imagine a scenario where a truth is thought to be true (e.g., the earth is round), but what is required is the knowledge to prove the truth (e.g., observations of shadows by Eratosthenes around 250 BCE). In making known the knowledge of this truth the rubber logic reveals that the distance between truth and knowledge is compressed in this instance.

For our purposes, it is important to note that the opposite is also possible. Namely, one can possess truth without knowledge or what Žižek refers to as non-knowledge. This gap between truth and knowledge presents three impasses. First, as already alluded to, there is a necessary reliance on the big Others to eliminate the gap between truth and knowledge. In an age of instantaneous media, the power of the big Other is augmented through repetition, distortion, and deflection. The distance between the non-subject and the big Others is shortened to an almost constant hailing. Yet, this is not simply about truth (as opposed to falsehoods or lies), as it is about eliminating the incompleteness of the big Others and the resultant painful sense of lack within the non-subject. Seeking to bring knowledge and truth together may be more a desire to eliminate lack than it is to pursue truth or knowledge. Second, elimination of the lack may not require knowledge, but rather depend on fantasy. Our behaviours, motivated by our desire to be the ethical All- American, may be sustained as much by unconscious fantasy and racial fantasies as they might by conscious knowledge as discussed below. Third, the big Others that are supposed to know may be revealed as failing to maintain and adhere to truths required by the non-subject in order to fulfil their desire for

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wholeness.

## I-War and symbolic demise

The everyday visibility of the stretch between knowledge and truth has triggered a shift in the desire to be an ethical All-American. This shift is I-War. I-War has come about due to the distanced desire of the non-subject to, not only, be the ethical All-American but to also cloak the visible 'demise of the symbolic authority' of the capitalist-market, nationalist-patriotic and religious- moral mirrors (Žižek 1999, 322). The consequence of this demise has not resulted in a re-imagining of what it means to be an American in a globalising world with several socio-economic, geopolitical, and biospheric emergencies. Instead, the promotion and militant adherence to specific traits, re-doubling of fantasy, along with interpassive believing informs the desire to become an ethical All-American. Think here how the knowledge of American accomplishments are now stretched away from truths such as, we're number one and land of the free. They have become examples of specific traits that rely upon means, beyond knowledge, for their sustenance. The distance between truth and knowledge is such that I-War forms the basis for attaining and retaining the ethical All-American non-subject position. My argument should not be confused with a sort of evolution from one to another, or the supplanting of one and the rejection of another. Instead, the rubber logic, the Möbius strip, suggests a distortion of the ethical All-American.

The emergence of the I-War non-subject corresponds most closely with the George W. Bush presidency. Key events include the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the 2006 Dubai Ports Deal, and the passage of the 2008 Emergency Economic Stabilization Act. All three of these have contributed to the demise of the symbolic order. Not only did activists engage in the largest anti-war protests, but the logic for the invasion continually shifted to the point where no logic prevailed or was accepted. Žižek (2004), drawing on Freud, refers to this shifting as the borrowed kettle where the multiplication of lies undermines certainty. I would add though that there was an important exception, namely those who believed the United States must act outside the law in order to produce the law. The Dubai Ports deal seen as a purely capitalist narrative of economic globalisation would be met with disgust as it was seen as running counter to both security and American exceptionalism. What was unconvincing was the Bush administration's insistence on national security through the waging of the War on Terror and the selling of what were perceived to be American-only and American strategic interests to a foreign firm. There can be no doubt as well that as the deal involved a company from the United Arab Emirates that this served to intensify objections. The events of the 2008 capitalist crisis, leading to the largest bailout in history by American taxpayers, would ultimately lead to both the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements who openly challenged the symbolic order as being insufficient.

This growing tension between the hailing of the ethical All-American and the furthering gap that is productive of I-War may be expressed, for example, with a seemingly benign exchange between the 2008 Republican Presidential candidate John McCain and a would-be voter who stated, 'I don't trust Obama...He's an Arab'. McCain responded saying, 'No, ma'am, he's a decent, family man, a citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with' (Stewart 2018). This exchange reveals mis-knowing, as both are shocked by the other's response. McCain failed to understand the woman's sacrifice as she was seemingly overwrought by the inability of the symbolic order, represented here by McCain, to re-present as whole. As Derek Hook (2021) notes, the racist fantasy played out by the would-be voter was not simply of fear that Obama formed an illicit obstacle to being an ethical All-American. It was also a contradictory sense of enjoyment of hatred by the would-be voter as it was functioned to produce the ethical All-American social bond (Chebrolu 2020). McCain's response instead reminded the would-be voters of the lack within the symbolic that reaffirmed their own subjective lack further distancing them from attaining the ethical All-American identification and consequently marching them towards identification as I-War.

Taking this one step further, the movement towards I-War may be understood through the lens of nostalgia and difference. What McCain misrecognised was what President George W. Bush signified during this first term which was nostalgia. President Bush with his gaffes and seemingly folksy tone and presentation along with his stern responses to 9/11 harkened back to a simpler utopian past where the symbolic order was without lack, thereby making it seem possible to attain subjective completion as the ethical All-American. McCain in that exchange, and the eventual winner of the presidential election Barack Obama, signified openness to the unknown with the calamity of lack manifesting and thereby removing the possibility of subjective completion, cementing the drive to I-War. To

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further complicate this, it is clear that this reading is not complete without its reversal namely that former President Obama represented the possibility of attaining the ethical All-American and Bush the movement away. This is certainly possible. Nevertheless, the point is that the manifestation of intensifying insecurities quickly dissipated the possibilities of hope and change associated with President Obama. Lack and the symbolic demise would only intensify.

## **I-War: Belief and specific traits**

Returning to the discussion of the rubber logic associated with truth and knowledge, we can identify the substance holding the two together-apart. Lacan suggests that a transcendental identification, such as the ethical All-American, is made possible with the articulation of specific traits (Haute 2002). These signifiers are fixed points allowing the non-subject the possibility of becoming the ethical All-American. At that very moment that the split subject identifies with the specific trait or signifier, the specific trait determines the subject entirely. In other words, the non-subject disappears under the signifier. Signifiers such as (but not limited to) beacon for democracy, a city upon a hill, competition, freedom, leader of the free world, and liberty are indicative of truths without the requirement of knowledge. The work done by specific traits, which conforms to the foregrounding of the I-War identification, is not simply the denial of the possibility of lack within the capitalist-market, religious-moral and nationalist-patriotic mirrors. Instead, it also compels the activation of the non-subject to assume that they are the originators of the laws once enunciated within the symbolic order. Politically the inability to become the ethical All-American requires the elimination of the other. I-war disavows the other's statements, claims and presence. Yet, in this attempt, what is disavowed is the non-subject's identification of an object of derision. The other is made into a cartoon requiring that they be smacked, walloped, or woken up in order to be a real American.

President Trump has fundamentally altered the presidency as he is the first president of the I-War identification. Candidate Donald Trump brought attention to the widening demise in the symbolic order that blocked any possibility of being an ethical All-American. Trump (2016) announced, '[o]ur convention occurs at a moment of crisis for our nation. The attacks on our police, and the terrorism in our cities, threaten our very way of life. Americans watching this address tonight have seen the recent images of violence in our streets and the chaos in our communities'. He continued to speak about the economic decay across the United States, focusing on job losses and deindustrialisation. Identifying immigrants, corrupt politicians, globalists, and smart adversaries as the cause of the blockage, he called on their removal to Make America Great Again. He went on to say, 'I have a message for all of you. The crime and violence that today afflicts our nation will soon – and I mean very soon – come to an end. Beginning on January 20th, 2017, safety will be restored'. President Trump would be a lightning rod for those who insisted that the other stole their enjoyment of attaining the ethical All-American identification. Over this period, what would be on full display was the enjoyment supporters exuded in stating that their enjoyment had been stolen. More importantly for the manifestation of the I-War identification, came the unwavering faith in the truth of the specific traits as this made all of this possible.

While President Trump was electorally defeated in 2020, the I-War identification suggests a war with no beginning or end. I-War brings individuals as battlefield, the individual as the detonation. What is sought by the I-War identification is full-spectrum security – social, cultural, economic, geopolitical, spiritual, biological, and so forth. It is not an idyllic or utopian vision of a society without crime for example. It is a society seeking to regain that which was always impossible.

## **Conclusion**

Post-truth came to dominate global headlines with the 2015 American presidential campaign, the subsequent presidency of Donald Trump along with the 2016 Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom. The term was selected in 2016 as the Oxford Dictionary's 'Word of the Year' and defined as, 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief' (Oxford Dictionaries 2016). I have argued that the Lacanian theorisation of subject formation as a split-subject challenges the assumed straight forward relationship between individuals and truth. Instead, as argued, individuals are split between three hailing mirrors informing them on how to be a subject. I have described that subject as the ethical All-

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American. Locating that identification within the American neoliberal symbolic order-disorder, I have suggested that the demise of the symbolic order to affirm this identification has resulted in the formation of a militant identity known as I-war. Those hailed as I-War assume themselves to be the originators of the symbolic law, of truths. Described as specific traits of the ethical All-American, these truths are thought to be transcendental in form and consequently exist outside the processes of knowledge formation. Consequently, knowledge is discounted and viewed as unimportant in the quest to affirm truths that underpin the possibility of subjecthood.

The significance of this analysis is that it lays visible that interventions, such as the New York Times in-depth explanation of how to evaluate fake news (Schulten and Brown 2017) or fact-checking (e.g., Politifact) that reveal claims to be false and banning content and users on social media platforms while important are inadequate to remedy the situation. It is not, however, a rejection of facts and expertise (see Nichols 2017). But rather more complex. Experts line up on all sides. How to decide? How to know which expert or pundit or neighbour presents the truth? This cannot be glossed over by patronising and caricaturing others as believers in post-truth, fake news and so forth. Therein lies the deeper danger to dismiss, to try and show one's position as superior because the other is whatever negative descriptor one can muster. These are all fantasies based on the assumption of becoming the ethical All-American without another. The truth, for the subject, will always remain divided and necessarily incomplete because the subject itself is barred from knowing the complete truth of their own subjectivity. It is only by understanding this that we can begin to build a different democracy that befits an era of massive information flows characterised by intensifying socio-economic, geopolitical, and biospheric emergencies.

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